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Measuring quality of life in dogs with chronic inflammatory ear disease

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Little is known about pain associated with otitis externa (OE) in dogs and its impact on quality of life (QoL). The study investigated the sensory and emotional effects of chronic or recurrent OE using conventional pain assessment techniques combined with evaluation of QoL with the Canine Brief Pain Inventory (CBPI). Forty-one dogs with unilateral or bilateral OE that was recurrent or of at least 2 months duration were recruited. Questionnaires on disease severity, QoL and pain were completed by owners at 0, 4 and 8 weeks post-recruitment and results were correlated with a validated clinical score for OE. Fifteen healthy control dogs were similarly evaluated to confirm the stability of assessments over time. There was a weak correlation between owner reported severity and clinical OE score at week 0 ($R = 0.28$, $n = 38$, $P = 0.089$), and a stronger correlation at week 4 ($R = 0.488$, $n = 33$, $P = 0.004$). There was a significant decrease in median clinical OE score over time (week 0 = 9, week 8 = 4.5, $n = 24$, $P = 0.001$). Median owner reported severity of ear disease decreased across all three time points (week 0 = 53, week 8 = 13, $n = 25$, $P < 0.0001$), as did owner reported median pain severity (week 0 = 2, week 8 = 0, $n = 25$, $P = 0.003$); however, QoL was not found to change significantly from 'good' on the CBPI over time. Outcome measures were stable over time in healthy dogs. Owners recognized improvement in their dog's ear disease and related pain with treatment over time, but this was not associated with perceived changes in QoL. This suggests that owners may not perceive ear disease and associated pain to impact on their pet's QoL.

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